

ACS receives high praise from accreditation team

by Rachel Newton

The Pine Bluff Arsenal Army Community Service (ACS) office received a large pat on the back during a recent accreditation visit by a team from the Southwest Region Office of the U.S. Army Installation Management Agency. The office is just steps away from an official accreditation, according to Jerry Pye, ACS director.

"It was a lot of hard work and a lot of paper shuffling," said Pye, speaking in an interview a few days after the visit. "I think this team (ACS) is one of the best. Given the challenges that we faced, given the number of people we serve and given the number of programs each manager is in charge of and has to worry about, the bottom line on this installation is that we provide a service to the Soldiers."

"It is an unfortunate reality that in order to validate programs you have to have some sort of paper drill that goes with it because you have to be able to recognize and evaluate your services," added Pye. "It is also unfortunate that when you are dealing with people those sorts of hard-core numbers are sometimes hard to come by. You do not know if it is the fifth assistance in their lives that is going to make the difference or the fifteenth. They are all important."

The ACS office team made up of Jan Brewer, JoAnna Franklin, Merrie Vannucci and Pye are a good example of what teamwork is all about, said B.J. Murphy, director of Military Personnel and Community Activities, in a recent statement. "The four folks in that division work very closely together supporting all the Soldiers and family member programs," she said. "This group has worked extremely hard over the past year to put together their accreditation package. They deserve all the accolades that have been said about them. I could not be prouder of them."

Linda Hillyard, ACS program manager for the Southwest Region and accreditation team leader, had nothing but high praise for the office. "I want to say that I'm very impressed. Although Pine Bluff is a very small installation, Mr. Pye and his staff have maximized the individualized services provided to their customers," she said during an out briefing on the accreditation visit with Col. Tom Woloszyn, Arsenal commander, and Sgt. Maj. Jerry Curtiss. "The services are very successful and innovative and could be used as a model for other small installations."

Hillyard also had nothing but praise for the ACS staff. "I cannot say enough about the staff," she said. "They are dedicated and caring professionals. That has been evident throughout this visit."

Other members of the ACS accreditation team from Southwest Region were Marlene Nash, Keith Painter, Denise Turnipseed, and Rosalind Dennis. Each of these individuals evaluated various areas of the ACS programs including the ACS Family Advocacy program (AFAP), Army Family Team Building (AFTP), employment and financial readiness, ACS Exceptional Family member program, as well as the overall structure and oversight of the organization.

During the out brief, the evaluators individually went over the program areas they looked at during the week. In the area of deployment and mobilization, Nash said that the programs in place rival that of a large installation. "Even though you don't really have a big need in these areas," she said. "Jan does a phenomenal job with not only the folks who pass through here at Pine Bluff Arsenal but also reaches out to the Reserve and National Guard units in this area. That is a very important outreach that has become more important as time has gone by."

Nash said the "boots are on the ground" with the exceptional family member program offered by ACS. "Even though you don't have a great need for it right now," she said. "The program is there to make it happen."

In the area of employment, financial and relocation readiness, Painter praised Brewer and Franklin for their outstanding efforts with these programs. "After one day with the team, I would put what I have seen against anything I have seen at a large installation," he said.

In the area of volunteers, AFAP and AFTB, Turnipseed said that the preparations that she saw for the visit were truly outstanding. "We were provided we everything that we needed," she said. "The week was outstanding. I cannot say enough about the staff here. The warm, fuzzy feeling we received every day was just great."

In the area of the ACS Family Advocacy program, Dennis said that it was a pleasure to come to Pine Bluff Arsenal. "I have known Jerry for a long time," she said. "It was a pleasure to come here and see him in his role here as ACS director and also see how wonderfully they all work together. I appreciated all the hospitality throughout the installation. "

Dennis said that she received more information than she needed to see. "Ms. Vannucci provided above and beyond what was needed. If I had to make a comparison between Pine Bluff Arsenal and other installations no matter what size, I would say Pine Bluff would have no problem standing up with them."

Franklin, whose program area includes AFTB as well as financial readiness, said that the entire accreditation process was very enlightening. "We understood where we needed to improve and what we did well. I thought the evaluators were very professional and down-to-earth," she said. "I think in the future if we need any advice or information, we can just pick up the phone and they will be there for us."

Preparations for the visit were outstanding, said Hillyard. "All the preparations have truly made everything run smoother and have made it that much more successful," she said. "They (the ACS staff) deserve to be commended for what they have done."

During the visit, PBA individuals who have received services or participate in various ACS programs came by to lend their support to the office. One of these visits was with Donna Curtiss, wife of Sgt. Maj. Curtiss, and Karen Woloszyn, wife of Col. Woloszyn.

"I just got here last June. As far as volunteer services, the ACS office knows they can call me and I will be willing to help out wherever I can," said Donna. "I completed AFTB level two before I came to the Arsenal. I have been talking with JoAnna about becoming an AFTB master trainer. I am planning to attend a training course in April so I can be available to teach classes for ACS."

Donna said that the services ACS provides are invaluable to the family members.

"Jan does a welcome tour for new people. Whenever someone new comes into the area, she gets in touch with them and offers them a tour," she said. "She took me all around and showed me Pine Bluff and White Hall. That really helps. She is such a pleasant person. To take that nice person and associate them with ACS is very good."

The larger installations just cannot give you that personalized service, said Karen. "We are very fortunate to have someone that can do that," she said with a chuckle. "If you were at Fort Bragg, they would look at you like you were a bit crazy if you wanted similar service."

Pye said that the fact that the evaluators compared the PBA ACS office to major installations was sort of the icing on the cake.

"To me that was the pat on the back that we were looking for," he said. "We do our job which is to see the Soldier through the gates, help them while they are here and assist them as they leave the gates whether they are going into a civilian career or further military career. Our jobs are to make sure all the 'i's' are dotted and 't's' are crossed in their life and help them achieve the milestones they need."

A final report on the accreditation will be provided to the PBA commander upon completion.